Chapter VI

Protection and Transmission of Korean Folk Theatre

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I. Introduction

Without transmission, without passing on traditional knowledge, the arts will come to an end. In these pages, I will summarize my major findings related to the protection and transmission of yeonhui (Korean folk theatre). However, I ask the reader to consider this chapter as the broad brushstrokes of a much more complicated story, because there are significant differences in the transmission environments and practices among yeonhui groups – some unavoidable and related to their location or dramatic content, others tied to chance, such as the charisma of a leader.

My own path to comprehending these processes was primarily gleaned from interviews and participant-observation, the standard tools of ethnographic research. After beginning formal research in 2004, I practiced one type of *pungmul* (drumming while dancing) and three different mask dance dramas in seven different settings. I also observed rehearsals and performances and talked with a range of practitioners and enthusiasts ranging from beginning students to National Human Treasures from dozens of arts, and from academics to employees at the Cultural Heritage Administration.[2)]

A general overview of the system for protecting Korea's cultural heritage is essential to understand transmission of yeonhui in modern Korea. This system frames and influences all traditional arts activity within Korea.[3)] Essentially the government has become the patron of the traditional arts, removing or partially occluding market-driven concerns. As with most artist-patron relationships, the patron's taste impacts the artist's activities. The Korean government established the Cultural Property Protection Law (CPPL) in 1962 to protect intangible cultural heritage, ranging from the skills in arrow and kimchi-crock manufacture to performing different types of mask dance drama.[4)] Under this system, the arts were first catalogued by researchers and then designated for protection if approved by a group

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2) The Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) oversees the cultural heritage of the Republic of Korea on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. For more information about Korean arts, see the CHA website: www.cha.go.kr.

3) Even performers and groups that are not part of this system cannot escape the way that the CPPL shapes the traditional arts environment.

4) An article by Hyung Il Pai (2001) introduces the history of such legislation in Korea. Two books in English by Yang Jongsung (2003) and Keith Howard (2006) and a book in Korean by Jeong Sujin (2008) are great places to learn more about this system. To learn more about Korean mask dance dramas see Saeji (2012b). For historical information on mask dance dramas in English, I recommend Jeon Kyungwook (2005). The best comprehensive text on the mask dance dramas remains Yi Duhyon (1981), only available in Korean. Cho Ohkon (1988) offers some background explanation as well as translation of the dialogues for five dramas.

of scholars known as the *Munhwajae wiwonhoe* (Cultural Properties Committee).[5] After designation these scholars monitor arts activities, annulling items if need be. The arts are protected by individual practitioners in the case of solo performances and craftsmanship, or by *bojonhoe* (preservation associations) made up of all the registered group members for arts that require group participation, such as the yeonhui arts. Each *bojonhoe* is based in the same town where the art was historically practiced, with the exception of arts from North Korea, and the itinerant or widely practiced arts that professionalized near the end of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). Artists hold ranks closely tied to length of participation, and are responsible for transmitting skills to future generations of Koreans as well as performing or producing crafts. A subcommittee made of three members of the *Munhwajae wiwonhoe* evaluates and approves rank advancements. After several years as a *jeonsuja* (learner), the first test is for advancement to the rank of *isuja*, followed by *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo*, and finally, National Human Treasure.[6]

All facets of this law and its administration have been criticized and viewed as overtly politicized, and over a dozen revisions have been passed. Yet, fifty years into the heritage protection project, a dramatically transformed Korea is still home to many arts that could not have survived modernization without significant support. We should not be under the illusion that these arts have not been changed by the act of preventing change: governmental intervention has changed the arts in the name of keeping them unchanging. A lack of government help, along with a natural process of evolution, whereby only some of the arts survive may have also created something meaningful.

5) Nathan Hesselink (1998) and Roald Maliangkay (2004) describe how arts and artists are evaluated for inclusion in the CPPL program. An article by Roger Janelli (1986) details the history of folklore research in Korea.

6) It is hard to translate the term *isuja*. I suggest thinking of *isuja* as a regular artist, deemed capable of performing/creating art. Generally *isuja* are younger and less experienced, and follow the leadership of higher ranked artists. Although *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo* technically means "transmission education assistant," they shoulder most of the leadership and teaching and so translating the title as "teacher" seems appropriate. The National Human Treasures (in Korean, colloquially *ingan munhwajae*, or formally *boyuja*) are often old enough that they prefer to consult, and leave most teaching duties up to the younger members.

II. Transmission Methods

In modern Korea, transmission of yeonhui knowledge and skills (excluding the spiritual infection of non-hereditary shamans, or *gangsinmu*)[7] is usually accomplished through classes: in a group, one-on-one, or through an intensive camp. Alternately, a prospective learner can practice directly with a group, without ever taking formal lessons. I want to emphasize that only a small (very small) percentage of participants in these classes intend to pursue the arts seriously, and among those who do, many enroll in a class simply to gain inspiration, exposure, or skills – not to pursue performance of that art in the future. Students in clubs to learn the arts may be as attracted to the social environment and philosophy of the club as they are to actually learning to perform an art. Although learning opportunities exist, they are not enough to ensure transmission or to turn a beginner into a performer. Even after extensive class participation, a potential performer must still convince a *bojonhoe* to accept him or her as a member. After becoming a member it may take years before the title *isuja* is granted. During those intermediary years the new recruit may continue to amass experience through rehearsals, minor roles in performance, individual practice, and even continuing to enroll in classes or may become discouraged and quit. Exposed to various transmission barriers outlined below, many learners rethink their commitment to the arts.

No matter a student's motivations, in whatever learning environment, studying the traditional arts in Korea requires a large amount of repetition aimed at achieving an accurate imitation of the teacher. Until one is quite advanced, adding personal *mat* ("flavor" or individual interpretation) to performance is not encouraged – for the student desiring to make his or her unique mark on the arts, Korean traditional genres are a poor choice. The teacher generally demonstrates and then asks students to repeat music, lyrics, movements or dialogues from mask dance dramas. Dance is often taught through simultaneous copying of the teacher's motions followed by recreating the movement phrase as the teacher verbally calls out instructions over drum beats. Instructors will sometimes physically manipulate or correct stances or movements, but most teachers use this method with only the newest beginners. Although many teachers discourage any type of notation, increasingly students take notes particularly through utilizing technology such as smart phones to create a record to refer to while practicing alone.

7) In Korea there are two types of shamans. One type is hereditary, and transmission is carried out from one practitioner to another, often within families. The other type of shaman is considered to have been infected with a spirit. To learn more about Korean shamanism in English the works of Laurel Kendall (2010, 1985) are a good starting point. Korean language works that address shamanism and cultural policy include an article by Yang Jongsung (2004) and a thesis by Yun Donghwan (2008).

An enthusiastic student, depending on locality, may use multiple methods of learning. Many younger learners participate in clubs that allow for frequent practice, often with an older and more experienced club member available to provide some level of instruction. A combination of learning spaces allows students to continue to enjoy the atmosphere of yeonhui practice, while improving their skills. For example, during my dissertation field research, I attended intensive classes during summer and winter vacation at the Imsil Pilbong *Nongak* transmission center in *sangmo* (ribbon-hat dance), and then studied *sangmo* in Seoul in a small weekly class taught by an Imsil Pilbong *Nongak* instructor. My fellow students in Seoul were almost all students that I had first met while at the transmission center. I also learned Goseong *Ogwangdae* in intensive classes in Goseong, and practiced with the Bongcheon *Nori Madang* club in Seoul. Later at a winter intensive camp in Goseong two of the club members were also in attendance.[8)]

1. Classes

Classes are taught by members of the various *bojonhoe* in a variety of locations including community centers, schools, and universities. They are often offered as part of after-school programs, primarily at middle schools. In the area around Andong, the mask dance drama Hahoe *Byeolshingut Talnori* has become part of elementary school programs as well. High school programs for the performing arts are generally restricted to technical high schools and special arts high schools, and most Korean students attend college-preparatory high schools. Classes in yeonhui are sometimes offered at regional community centers, alongside other self-improving options like flower arranging, calligraphy, and Korean sign language. Most *bojonhoe* offer regular classes in the building that houses their office; often this is a transmission center maintained by the government and shared by several arts. Class fees for less popular arts tend to be lower, and they increase for arts that attract more students. Although learning arts like *pansori* (epic songs) or *salpuri chum* (shamanic mourning dance) can become quite expensive, most mask dance dramas charge only a nominal fee. Arts based in rural areas, however, rarely offer a regular class, instead focusing on rehearsal for members and periodic intensive courses for non-members.

Ongoing classes are generally held once or twice per week and run approximately two hours, with either rolling admission or a new class beginning every two or three months. Repeat enrollment is

8) Although the hobbyists interested in the traditional arts is larger than the population of professional performers, the traditional performing arts world is quite small. Seeing the same learners in classes and the same attendees at performances in a single genre is quite common. Keith Howard describes attendees at performances as participants in a circulating system of exchange (2011).

common, so most classes include students with a range of different abilities. This difference impacts the class process. A typical class or a rehearsal begins with a group review of basics. This review collects and coordinates the group energy. Many instructors mention the need for synchronized breathing as an essential part of Korean music and movement. Although in school or college classes the students may continue to learn as a group, in community classes – after spending a few minutes on this warm-up – students individually review while the teacher moves around the class, instructing students in smaller groups at similar levels. More advanced students are not explicitly directed to instruct less advanced students, but if they have the confidence to help the newer learners most teachers are pleased. If a group is advanced enough to rehearse scenes, others will frequently watch the rehearsal of a scene and give feedback after it is completed. One scene can be run repeatedly with members switching between observing and rehearsing different roles.

1) Classes in the University

University classes are offered to a growing number of music, dance, and theatre majors, although classes for non-majors are rare. The instructors, drawn from the ranked members of various yeonhui *bojonhoe*, often have a bachelor's degree in an arts discipline, and increasingly they may have a graduate degree as well. Yeonhui classes within music, dance or theatre departments are held at more than a dozen universities, with *pungmul* the most common subject. In addition there are now two universities in Korea with a serious interest in folk theatre: the geographically isolated fledgling Sehan University, and the government-supported Korea National University of the Arts (K-Arts). The Yeonhui Department at K-Arts has four primary areas of focus: mask dance drama, *pungmul* (drumming while dancing), *namsadangnori* (a type of traveling variety show incorporating puppetry, mask dance, *pungmul*, acrobatics and more), and *musok* (shamanic ritual, taught with an emphasis on music for ritual). The program at K-Arts has well known faculty members, among them Kim Duksoo (a famous drummer) and Choi Changju (a highly ranked performer of the mask dance drama Bongsan *Talchum*). Students spend each year of their studies focusing on different regional variants of *pungmul*, mask dance drama, and regional shamanic musical styles. They also learn skills from the *namsadang* canon: tight-rope walking as sophomores, for example. Despite the particular foci of each major, all students' course of study is fairly similar due to a departmental philosophy that to be properly prepared for a career in Korean folk theatre students must be trained to support artists from other genres.

This yeonhui program is receiving interest from young performers well positioned to become the next generation of traditional performance leaders, and although K-Arts only opened in 1990, it has already become one of the top choice schools for young artists. During the audition cycle beginning in 2011, there were over fifty applicants for just fifteen student spots in the yeonhui program. Most

applicants sought to pursue drumming, but four prospective students applied for mask dance drama and two were admitted. K-Arts' mask dance drama major is focused on Bongsan *Talchum*, Yangju *Byeolsandae*, and Goseong *Ogwangdae*, representing three major types of mask dance drama. The K-Arts program also gives students practice in fusion performance and knowledge of the theory and history of Korean performing arts.

Of the mask dance dramas, Bongsan *Talchum* is most commonly taught in university because it is one of the best known of all the mask dance dramas. Although the art is from the North Korean province of Hwanghae, it is protected by a *bojonhoe* based in Seoul near a large number of universities. Lesser-known and rural arts are least likely to be taught in university. The case of Goseong *Ogwangdae* can illustrate the barriers to teaching in Seoul for non-Seoul based arts: at an invitation from K-Arts Goseong *Ogwangdae* sends an instructor to Seoul to teach weekly courses. The time commitment involved in traveling from the south coast to Seoul (near the northern border), and back again means that to teach one class the instructor must sacrifice at least ten hours to transportation time and often spend a night away from home.

2) Intensive Camps in the Arts

Some of the arts located far from major population centers hold summer (and sometimes winter) intensive camps. Students range from those with limited previous exposure to repeat participants. Most are members of university clubs who learn traditional art (s) and perform at least once per year on campus. For a week at a time students live together, practicing all day long and bonding over meals and drinks in the evenings. Arts such as Goseong *Ogwangdae* have been holding such classes every year for over four decades. Other *bojonhoe* irregularly offer a summer session based on instructor interest. The camps are an excellent method to teach performance: students enjoy themselves and the intensive nature of the camp means they can make substantial progress in a short period of time. At the end of a week participants at Goseong *Ogwangdae* can cooperatively stage the entire mask dance drama, and *pungmul* camps allow participants to show off their improved skills in group performance. The cooperative presentation at the end of the session raises spirits to a fever pitch – all centered on the art that made it possible. Meanwhile the instructors who taught the camp have had an excellent review of their skills and shared the art they love. Although the camps themselves are not enough to turn a student into a member of the *bojonhoe*, if they fall deeply in love with an art they may move to the local region and become regular participants.[9)]

9) I wrote about this phenomenon in a shorter article (2013), but for greater detail I recommend Donna Kwon's dissertation (2005).

3) One-on-One Learning

For learners of solo arts, such as most instrumental musical forms, private one-on-one learning is very useful. Learning individually from a private instructor is much less common in yeonhui than it is in other Korean arts because yeonhui is transmitted by a group. In fact the individualism of learning privately goes against the traditional ideas in yeonhui that a group must learn to perform with one heart or mind, inhaling and exhaling in unison. Since yeonhui is a group activity in rehearsal and performance, learners are also part of groups. Students interested in yeonhui most often seek out one-on-one lessons as they prepare to audition for K-Arts or other schools, such as Chungang University where there is a well-known percussion program. Individual lessons in these cases focus on a specific replicable solo element, such as mastering the dance, actions, and delivery of lines for a single (key) mask dance drama character or performing an impressive drumming solo.

2. Practicing with a *Bojonhoe*

Bojonhoe that are relatively unknown and struggle to attract learners may become discouraged at low enrollment and cease offering regular courses. All groups are required by the CPPL to teach the art, but this requirement can be satisfied by courses with restricted enrollment such as an after-school program. Without a course open to the general public, prospective new members may begin attending any regular (or irregular) rehearsals held by the group in lieu of taking a course. Through practicing basics with the group and absorbing lessons that senior members give to junior members during rehearsal, such informal learners may, after years of study, become registered members of the *bojonhoe*. Due to the lack of formal instruction; this method of learning is considerably slower than something like an intensive camp, or even regular class. Although learning is slower, this method more closely mirrors a traditional *yeonhui* learning process than the classroom environment described above.

III. Transmission Barriers

There are a variety of barriers to transmission. These include geographic barriers, logistical difficulties faced by groups, financial strain on performers, and finally the cultural policy seeking to protect the arts.

1. Geographic Barriers

Many of the various yeonhui arts are rooted to the locality in which they developed, and as a result their names generally begin with the name of their home region. For example, Tongyeong *Ogwangdae* is a mask dance drama from Tongyeong. A rural location can be a barrier to transmission because of the rapid rural-to-urban migration in Korea. It proves to be difficult for young people to remain in rural areas to learn from the local masters of traditional culture, as any youngster with promise is urged to concentrate on getting into the best college in Seoul, leaving their hometown for good. Although attracting students to attend intensive courses is one way to overcome geographic barriers, preservation associations for many rural arts believe that locality is key to becoming a member of the group. Certainly without extended study, made more difficult by distance, most non-local learners cannot achieve a degree of proficiency adequate to preserve traditional knowledge. If a learner wants to become a member of a rural group he or she will have to move, at least temporarily, to the home of that group.

The roots in specific places, even those far from an urban center, do bring some benefits. Hwang Jong-uk, performer and the office director of Goseong *Ogwangdae*, explained that local pride of place can bring significant investment from the local government.[10] Furthermore, many types of support are mobilized through the networks of each of the members, who come from all walks of life. Unlike in a large city, the members of the Goseong *Ogwangdae bojonhoe* have personal relationships and connections that can be leveraged, whether to encourage someone to attend a performance or to receive meaningful technical assistance. The experiences of other rural groups vary. While some are neglected, Hahoe *Byeolshingut Talnori* has become a major event for domestic and international tourists with regular performances at Hahoe Folk Village from March to October. Unsurprisingly strategic decisions by the city of Andong, nearby Hahoe Folk Village, have much to do with the drama's increased visibility and ever-improving infrastructure.

To summarize, although rural to urban migration has reduced the pool of learners in rural locations, active *bojonhoe* have found that rural locations do have advantages. Only the future will tell us if the benefits of a rural location can outweigh the difficulty of recruiting new members from a shrinking rural population.

10) From an interview conducted in Goseong at the Goseong *Ogwangdae* Transmission Center on July 16th, 2013.

2. Difficulties Faced by Group Arts

One of the large barriers to the performance, transmission, and preservation of Korea's folk theatre is mobilizing the participation and coordination of a group. Group arts face three main difficulties: rehearsal coordination, performance coordination, and financial parity.

Rehearsal requires a group, and scheduling can be difficult since members may have primary jobs with inflexible schedules, as well as responsibilities to their families.[11] In general groups have a regular rehearsal, often on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. For a satisfying rehearsal of two or three scenes from a mask dance drama, at least a dozen members must be present. A *janggu* (hourglass drum) player is essential, and popular scenes in many mask dance dramas require nine or more players on stage at one time. I have seen rehearsal time wasted on acrimonious complaints about the commitment level of players who are absent or late. Attendance at rehearsal becomes an even larger concern as important performances draw near, such as the annual full-length performances evaluated by members of the *Munhwajae Wiwonhoi*. International performances for which a smaller number of players try to fill all the parts (to reduce costs) also require special rehearsals.

Just as it is difficult to get all members to attend rehearsals, performance scheduling is challenging. Usually, when a performance opportunity arises the office manager for the group immediately calls several key members to see if they are available for that day and time. Most of the mask dance drama groups need over twenty members for a performance, including musicians, and more for a full-length performance.[12] The participation of particular members is often indispensable, due either to a crucial role or to their high status. Particularly for an out-of-town performance that may require a night away from home (the majority of performances for groups from rural areas), mobilizing twenty or more performers can be difficult. International performances are the most challenging. The Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) may provide substantial funding assistance for international performances (once per year per group), but only to supplement the travel costs of a limited number of members who are ranked as a National Human Treasure, *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo*, or *isuja*. Meanwhile, the members of a group who have more travel flexibility (and resilience in the face of jet lag and foreign food) are often the youngest members of a group, who may not yet be ranked *isuja*.

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11) I have observed that women with younger children rarely participate intensively in *bojonhoe* rehearsal and performance, unless their husband also performs. However, the age of children does not seem to have an influence on the participation of male members.

12) Full length performances include all the scenes in a drama, and can run as long as five hours. By performing only some scenes a mask dance drama can avoid the need for especially difficult to transport props, or scenes with the largest number of players. Groups will also select appropriate scenes for a projected audience.

Here is an illustration of the difficulties: In 2010 the group Songpa *Sandaenori*, invited to Shanghai for the World's Fair, needed a *haegeum* (two string fiddle) performer to accompany them. Their usual *haegeum* player was an excellent performer, but it had never occurred to the group to nominate her for status as an *isuja* since her primary allegiance was to the instrument, and accompanying the mask dance drama group was just a paying outlet for her talents. Bringing her to Shanghai meant spending group funds on her airfare, since the CHA would not help. The use of these funds on the *haegeum* player's airfare taxed the group's resources, and since the group left behind some other members, it also resulted in hurt feelings.

In general, scheduling a performance is easier for groups with a larger number of trained performers, but groups that are based in rural areas have difficulties with recruiting members, and may have barely more performers in their *bojonhoe* than is necessary for a performance.

Financial parity is also an issue. Group arts have greater expenses and yet end up receiving a smaller performance fee. There are two main reasons: first, the number of people who divide up the fee, and second, a culture of free traditional performance. Large groups, unfortunately, usually receive the same appearance fee given to small groups, or even solo performers. A *pansori* singer and an accompanying *gosu* (drummer) can travel to a venue or festival with a fan, *hanbok* to wear while performing, and a drum. A mask dance drama group must rent a bus for an out-of-town performance, and haul chests full of costumes, masks, instruments, and props. A solo dancer, a singer, or musician may be able to present long or short pieces with only a single accompanist, but even one scene of a mask dance drama needs four or more musicians and several dancers. Fees for performance are often set by the venue based on a series of performances underwritten by the same source of funds. Under this model there may be a Sunday afternoon performance every week with the same fee given out each Sunday: 3,000,000 won is not unusual although appearance fees fluctuate greatly. The same fee would be given to a group of four singers and a drummer and to a mask dance drama with twenty or more performers. Solo performers who are presented together on the same stage, for example in KOUS's *Palil* dance series, are given between 200,000 and 500,000 won each (in this series every evening features eight dancers, all accompanied by the same group of musicians who are paid separately by KOUS). The various yeonhui groups are keenly aware that their performance fees are lower than those of solo performers, and this is an ongoing source of tension.

The government has a long-standing tradition of supporting traditional performance through making it free for the public to attend. Although the number of performances of traditional arts that require tickets has increased, many ticketed performances are from a few genres that have wider public support, including solo dance and some genres of vocal and instrumental music. Mask dance dramas, *pungmul*, and shamanic ritual performances were traditionally part of village celebrations. Many performers and promoters prefer to continue presenting these genres outdoors, away from the

proscenium stage environment. As outdoor performances often occur in large festivals or off to one side of a historic site (e.g., palaces and folk villages), it is unusual for people to pay specifically for the performance, even though they may have paid to enter the site. Unfortunately the continual presence of free yeonhui performances may cause Koreans to value the performances less than those shows they paid for directly.

A final reason why people may hesitate to buy tickets for yeonhui performances is connected to the personal experience many college students had during the 1970s and 1980s. At that time *pungmul* and mask dance drama clubs existed on almost every campus. These groups, tied closely to the democratization movement, created an impression of yeonhui as play by the people, for the people – in other words, not a performance of art by professionals.

As long as audiences continue to expect yeonhui performances to be free, the groups are tied heavily to government patronage, leaving them vulnerable to changing fiscal priorities and beholden to their patron.

3. Recruitment

Finances are not only an issue when comparing the solo and group arts, but also a barrier to recruitment, as is the lack of visibly successful traditional performers. These are two of the main reasons why the participants in traditional folk theatre are primarily self-selected.

1) Financial Difficulties

When the Cultural Property Protection Law was originally instituted the intention of the law was that National Human Treasures would teach with assistance from the second-ranked *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo*. At that time often only the members of these two highest ranks had considerable experience, but today things have changed. It is not unusual to meet *isuja* who have already been learning and performing for over twenty years. At present there are many National Human Treasures who cannot actively teach (because of old age); generally *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo* oversee teaching opportunities, and the third-ranked *isuja* are either primary teachers or significant assistant teachers. *Isuja* are younger and have more energy for teaching, but they do not receive a stipend from the government. To earn money from their art, they must rely on performance and teaching fees. There are few opportunities for yeonhui performers to teach and there are large numbers of people in each group that could instruct. As Table 1 (below) illustrates, there were 549 ranked members of the fourteen mask dance dramas in 2011 – that means that for a prospective student of mask dance drama there were approximately 549 prospective teachers, an average of 39 people per group capable of being hired to teach a class or tutor a student.

Stipends are given to National Human Treasures and *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo*. In addition the groups with difficulty recruiting can apply for 150,000 won per month to be distributed to special scholarship students. There are also some small financial grants set aside for National Human Treasure Emeritus, such as assistance with funeral costs. Unfortunately the stipends are, to paraphrase many an interviewee, "too little, too late." When artists are young and struggling to make ends meet – to support a family, to afford the education of their child – they do not receive a stipend. If they manage to resolve their financial dilemma and continue performing, they may reach the status of *jeonsu gyoyuk jogyo* and receive 500,000 won per month. This usually happens when they are in their fifties: a simple check of the records kept by the Cultural Heritage Administration quickly proves that very few performers reach this level while still in their forties. The stipend for National Human Treasures is still only 1,000,000 won per month; it has not been increased in half a decade.

Types of Arts Certified for National Protection

		Arts					Crafts		Total
		Music	Dance	Drama	Games and Rites	Martial arts	Crafts	Food	
Registered arts	Number of registered arts	17	7	14	24	1	49	2	**114**
	Arts including sub-divisions	24	7	14	27	1	49	4	**126**
Preservation Associations or bojonhoe		14	4	13	26			1	**58**
Artists and Artisans	National Human Treasure	39	11(1) *	25	37	1	65	4	**182(1)**
	Jeonsu Gyoyuk Jogyo (teacher)	89	21(1)	63	72	2	50	1	**298(1)**
	Isuja (performer / artist)	1,909	690	461	600	49	471	17	**4,197**
	Scholarship Students	13		1			58		**72**
	Total	**2,050**	**722(2)**	**550**	**709**	**52**	**644**	**22**	**4,749(2)**
Human Treasure Emeritus		2	1	5	6		7	1	**22**

Figures from the Cultural Heritage Administration as of 5/31/11. * The number in parentheses indicates that a single individual is holding this rank in two arts, there are two such individuals.

2) Visible Artistic Success

In the arts, success often is equated with being visible and known. A generation ago most Korean parents would have strongly opposed children yearning for success through acting, singing, or dancing but the ubiquitous and highly visible young *hallyu* (Korean media culture) stars have caused some parents to change their minds. The popular performers in advertisements, on television shows, and on the cover of glossy magazines serve as evidence that with an attractive face and luck in an audition, dreams of stardom can come true. The very absence of traditional artists in the limelight may prevent younger people from considering the traditional arts as a viable career. Certainly, multi-million dollar advertisement contracts are not being awarded to performers of yeonhui. Although some solo traditional performers have become relatively well-known, yeonhui requires group participation and performers' names are rarely mentioned unless they are the National Human Treasure for the group. Even the performers shouldering a major solo or technical role are not highlighted on performance pamphlets or lauded by emcees. If young people saw traditional artists receive even some of the respect and adoration accorded to teenage *hallyu* stars it would be possible to attract more learners.

3) Self-Selection

Due to many of the barriers to transmission already mentioned it is unsurprising to realize that in the performance and transmission of traditional performing arts, commitment – especially of time – has become more important than talent. Self-selection has become the single biggest factor in who participates in the traditional arts: so few people continue to participate throughout their lives that natural talent or impressive skills are not determining factors. Through the investment of time many of the older performers who have been involved with the performing arts for decades have developed formidable talents and expertise. This is fortunate because Korean attitudes towards age and seniority make it difficult for a group not to continue to promote the oldest and longest participating member.

Groups have tried various methods to retain new recruits even as they leave for the military, get married, or become busy with a career outside the arts. One popular method was once to hold courses targeted at older housewives.[13] Middle class and upper middle class women with abundant free time enjoy the feeling of community they gain from participating in the traditional performing arts with others from their neighborhood. Some current performers originally began learning as part of classes

13) An article by Don Baker (1995) examines such a housewife class for one mask dance drama.

offered at, for example, 10 a.m. This trend helped to create more even gender distribution in arts once heavily dominated by male performers. Another method has been to offer the intensive courses mentioned earlier. This has worked well for some groups, for example, many of the current *isuja* for Imsil Pilbong *Nongak* began as paying participants in intensive courses. For other groups, these courses are not designed as recruitment tools: Goseong *Ogwangdae* offers such courses, yet allows only people rooted in the area to become members of the *bojonhoe*.[14)]

I specifically collected data on the employment of each member of four mask dance drama *bojonhoe*. It became clear that among the performers of mask dance dramas who hold jobs outside the arts, many have more flexibility than the average Korean worker. The performers often work for schools, are self-employed, or work in jobs where scheduling can be flexible (e.g. at very small companies, or for institutions like hospitals where shifts may be traded). Older members of rural *bojonhoe* are often farmers. I did not find any mask dance drama performers who worked for major companies such as Samsung and Hyundai, where company policies of fairness would discourage anyone from leaving early for a rehearsal or skipping a workday to travel to an out-of-town performance. In large part this means that in Korea, as in much of the world, artists are outliers within the general population.

4) The *Wonhyeong*

Finally, an enduring barrier to transmission is the *wonhyeong* requirement. The *wonhyeong* is an archetypal form of the art that was fixed at the time the art was designated an item of intangible cultural heritage. The entire CPPL revolves around the importance and primacy of protecting the *wonhyeong*, other elements of the law are all contingent on the idea that one perfect authentic version of each art exists (and that it can be recorded and categorized as authoritative). According to cultural policy, all performances of "authentic" tradition should be in accordance with this *wonhyeong*. Yeonhui was orally transmitted and improvisatory until the 1930s or even until registered with the CPPL. As an orally transmitted art form, each performance was slightly different, and it was these changes that gave audience members a way to connect with each performance in an era without the range of entertainment options we have today. What the *wonhyeong* does is taxidermize the arts – the equivalent of showing an audience endless re-runs. Despite performer and venue efforts to mix things up, the performances

14) I discuss this issue in detail in an article in the *Journal of Korean Studies* (2013), more recently Goseong *Ogwangdae* has employed a former camp participant from Seoul in the *bojonhoe* office, but he has moved to Goseong and over a year after relocating, has not yet been inducted into the *bojonhoe*.

essentially remain the same, even though they never did in the era from which this "authentic" *wonhyeong* emerged.[15)]

Numerous examples of the problematic nature of the *wonhyeong* exist. Such difficulties include designation of one out of multiple versions (the case of Jindo *Dasiraegi*),[16)] resurrection of arts based on memories of non-performers (the case of Gangnyeong *Talchum*),[17)] and politically charged decisions to roll back the natural changes in the arts (the case of Gasan *Ogwangdae*).[18)] Yet even when a specific performance has been continually performed and there is no controversy surrounding the designated *wonhyeong*, the existence of this archetypal form is, in some ways, a barrier to transmission. Nathan Hesselink explains: "the choice to delimit the traditional is an act of historical perspective and interpretation, highly susceptible to politics, financial gain, and personal whim" (2012: 134).

Beyond considerations of the subjective nature of the *wonhyeong*, vibrant cultural expressions maintain that vibrancy because they are continually changing – the door has not been closed on innovation and this keeps art relevant to the population. The *wonhyeong* essentially removes Korean traditional performance from this natural process. Therefore, it is unsurprising that many Korean young people do not feel a connection with traditional performance forms or genres. Historical factors, of course, have also played a major role in the side-lining of the traditional arts, particularly the various ways that traditional performance was inhibited and in some cases/times prohibited during the Japanese colonial era (1910-1945). It is no coincidence that some of the more successful iterations of Korean tradition in the modern era are new creations that, because they operate outside the restrictions of the *wonhyeong*, have been more welcoming of innovation and attracted audiences and young participants because they felt fresh and exciting. The drumming form *samulnori*, an updated version of *pungmul*, is an ideal example of how arts allowed to change can spark new interest in traditional instruments and aesthetics.

The well-intentioned CPPL was established during an earlier era in the understanding and scholarly exploration of performance, in response to the devastating impact of national division and the thirty-five year occupation on Korean culture. The scholars who assisted in designation of the arts came

15) Efforts to present the arts in new ways include, in the case of certain *pungmulgut* festivals such as those performed by Imsil Pilbong *Nongak*, presenting a fusion or *samulnori* piece halfway through the event. In the case of mask dance dramas sometimes three groups will all present one scene – the lion dance, the grandmother scene, the old monk's scene – back to back, so that the audience can appreciate the differences between each. Yet because this resembles watching the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* three times by three different companies, I believe it is of limited interest to non-specialists.

16) To learn more about the designation of Jindo *Dasiraegi*, see Keith Howard (2006: 121–131).

17) Yang Jongsung, mask dancer and scholar, explains the case of Gangnyeong *Talchum* (2003: 53–64).

18) The case of Gasan *Ogwangdae* is excellently detailed in an article by Yi Hunsang (2010) which I translated into English for publication in 2012.

from a variety of fields, yet few were performance specialists. Not having been a link in the process of transmission, these scholars did not understand the importance of the continually evolving nature of these folk performances. Initially the impact of attempting to prevent change was not felt. But fifty years after the law was established, scholars who both research performance and are also practitioners, understand the implications of this type of standardization. Nathan Hesselink offers this assessment:

> At some point in the not-so-distant future it will become painfully obvious that what Cultural Property performers are doing today is not what their predecessors had done – however closely they might adhere to the *wonhyeong* as established by Cultural Property documentation – and that for their art to continue to have relevance to themselves and the general public they must allow for their current, personal, and even idiosyncratic experiences to impinge on their performance and understanding of the traditional (Hesselink 2012: 134).

Many performers and researchers in Korea agree with Hesselink. There are multiple and repeated calls for changes to the CPPL and other associated cultural policies. Some of these are short-sighted and self-serving; but others demonstrate that the individuals most intimately connected to the arts, the artists themselves, have the clearest ideas about necessary revisions. Jeong Sujin explains:

> The National Human Treasures' critical voices persistently underscore the vulnerability of external assessment and control. In fact, those critical voices have the possibility of being connected to restoration of each art form's creative fundamentals, and of isolated as well as various logics of aesthetics. Therefore now the possibility of changing the system's logic depends on whether or not social conditions where those conversations can be recognized as persistent and legitimate have been created (2008: 232).

As Jeong states, there remains a lack of recognition of the voice of the artists. When the CPPL was created many National Human Treasures were still illiterate or semi-literate and many of the academics involved in designating arts were convinced of their own superior knowledge and understanding. The authority and power given to academics at that time allowed some to run roughshod over the artists, and yet the law continues to prioritize academics. The *Munhwajae wiwonhoe* still consists of individuals with doctorates, many of whom cannot speak from the experience of performance because they have never performed publicly and this has to change. Artists must be given the authority to access and utilize their own deep knowledge of the arts to evaluate the arts and revise the CPPL.

IV. Looking toward the Future

I have two major observations related to the future of transmission and Korean folk theatre. Professionalization and participation have developed an inverse relationship: while professionalization in performance is increasing, participation is unfortunately decreasing.

1. Professionalization is increasing

Professionalization amongst performers of Korean folk theatre began with itinerant performers of variety shows such as the *Namsadang* troupes and employees of the court and local governments who provided entertainment for the elite. Most of Korea's mask dance dramas, with the exception of that performed by the *Namsadang*, were village-type shows that were performed just once or twice per year by locals. In the late nineteenth century Bongsan *Talchum* and Songpa *Sandaenori* transitioned from seasonal celebration associated with major events on the agricultural calendar to regular and re-occurring performances at a fixed location. Their advantageous locations (at a town on a major trade route and at a major port, respectively) brought trade to that locale instead of competing towns and ports. The Japanese Colonial Era and subsequent lean years made it difficult for artists to survive based on performance alone. In the early years of the CPPL, not only were the performers primarily employed in other lines of work, but the romanticized and nostalgic attitudes toward folk performance encouraged an image of the talented drummer or shaman who was also plain spoken, rural, and engaged in agricultural work such as growing rice and chili peppers (as in Yeh 1997). Gradually in the modern era, professionalized performance has increased. Municipalities established traditional music orchestras, universities began to offer courses in Korean music, dance, and theatre (even if generally taught by adjunct instructors), and as the disposable income in Korea increased, additional opportunities related to traditional arts appeared.

Certain groups perform often; in recent years perhaps no other mask dance drama group performs as often as Hahoe *Byeolshinguttalnori*. Their active performance schedule makes it almost impossible for these players to be engaged in other work for three seasons per year and has facilitated the continued participation of individuals willing to prioritize performing with the group over other jobs. Yet these performers earn less than a living wage. Bongsan *Talchum*, long the best known mask dance drama, is particularly professionalized. Their base in Seoul facilitates the members' professionalization as they often combine income streams from multiple arts-related sources, or work for other arts organizations.

My field research has revealed two connected and statistically supported observations: first, younger members of the mask dance drama groups are more likely to be employed exclusively in the

performing arts. These days few young people become involved if they do not intend to make a living out of their passion for the arts. Many of them emerge from university with a related diploma. For them being a ranked member of a government-supported group adds a line to their resume: this increases their legitimacy as an accomplished traditional performer, expands their network, and provides additional contributions to their income. They may earn other income directly connected to their membership in the group, through teaching classes, working as a certified supplementary public school teacher of the traditional performing arts, or by becoming regular salaried performers with performing companies such as Seoul *Yesuldan*. Second, musicians are even more statistically likely to eschew non-arts related employment. Through teaching lessons in their instrument and accompanying other performers, they are generally more financially secure than yeonhui performers who do not play music. This mirrors the general case for traditional music in Korea, which has professionalized more rapidly than other types of traditional performance.

2. Participation is Decreasing

Although the increased professionalization in the performing arts may be a positive sign, the decreased participation that I have observed is much less hopeful. Many young Koreans, perhaps more than ever before, have dreams of stardom supported by a highly successful movie industry and the pervasive presence of popular music in daily life. The traditional performing arts, becoming ever more disconnected from ordinary Koreans, are struggling to attract young participants. The majority of ranked performers in most Korean yeonhui groups were added to the roll books in the 1970s and 1980s. Although *pungmul* drumming, partially due to the popularity of *samulnori*, continues to attract young people, most of the mask dance drama groups lack young members. Several groups have no ranked member under thirty, others have none under forty. The lack of visible young people in these groups can make it hard to connect with young potential students, and hence it is difficult to reverse such trends.

V. Final Words

In these pages I have shared a number of observations based on ten years of research on Korean folk theatre, primarily mask dance dramas. As the lifestyle and economic conditions in Korea change, participation in yeonhui, once confined to the lowest classes of society, has come into its own. Talented, hard-working individuals can become full-time arts professionals in the twenty-first century and receive the respect due their commitment to Korean tradition. This commitment and increasing professionalization also changes the arts – performances lose rough edges and become polished as movements are visually optimized through years of practice in front of mirrors. The trend of seeking out arts-specific education (to the master's level or above) has also helped a new generation of performers to articulate their own thoughts on arts and Korean aesthetics. I am encouraged as I see many younger members of yeonhui *bojonhoe* branching out to produce dizzyingly creative new works that effectively connect with younger audiences.[19] I am also hopeful about appropriate changes to cultural policy promoted by these artists who are more prepared to debate the future of the arts than their predecessors.

19) I discuss two of the creative newer performance teams in an article from the *Asian Theatre Journal* (Saeji 2012).

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